

THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Exercising The Mind || Igniting The Heart || Preparing The Hands
A free quarterly paper for rural pastors.

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Editor: Aaron Dunlop



Watering Camels at Boka Wells, Kora (Aaron Dunlop)

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WELCOME TO THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Welcome to this issue of The Pastor's Study, a magazine designed to help pastors in the study of the Word and in subjects that are helpful for a broad, instructive and effective teaching ministry. These include practical and pastoral theology, church history and devotional reading.

We have a special editorial in this issue. We are pleased and privileged to interview Rev. Iain Murray, founding editor of the Banner of Truth magazine (page 3). The theme of this issue is the visit of the shepherds to the infant Jesus (Luke 2:8–20), with an example of how to preach from this chapter (page 5). The feature article is a commentary on the text (pages 6–8). We include a “step by step” section to take you through the process of preaching from the story (page 9).

In this issue also, we have articles on how God used shepherds, by Pastor Caleb Nakina (page 12), and the worship of angels, by Pastor John Dyck (page 13–14). The devotional, by Pastor Joshua Muthukya, draws our attention again to the visit of the angels (page 20).

Pastor Tonny Karwa brings us some pastoral advice on how to encourage your people to pray (page 15–16). Dr. Joel Beeke writes again on piety, focusing on the sacrament or the ordinances of the Church (page 17). Dr. Michael Haykin writes on marriage, drawing lessons from the life of the Puritan writer Richard Baxter (page 18–19).

Sincerely, Aaron Dunlop

EDITORIAL: INTERVIEW WITH REV. IAIN MURRAY

In the second half of the 20th century, no other magazine was more influential in promoting Reformed theology and literature than the *Banner of Truth* magazine.

The founder and first editor of that magazine was Iain Murray. Rev. Murray was born in England in 1931. He was converted in 1949 and that same year he met Jean Walters who became his wife. While at university he began to read the Puritans, and in 1955 launched The *Banner of Truth* magazine and became its first editor.

Around this time also he was the assistant to Dr. Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel, in London and was instrumental in the founding of the Banner of Truth Trust. In 1961 he left Westminster to become a pastor at Grove Chapel, London. He later pastored in Australia, before returning to the UK. Rev. Murray and

his wife now live in Edinburgh, Scotland, still blessing the Church with his gift of writing.

In June 2023, I interviewed pastor Iain Murray to draw from his almost 70 years of experience in Christian publishing. I had previously sent him copies of our own *The Pastor's Study*. Here is some of that conversation.

Ed.: What was the purpose and vision behind the *Banner of Truth* magazine?

IM: We felt that something seriously had been lost. It was the old evangelical and Calvinistic writings. And so, our hope and our prayer was that something of the older writings, Puritans and reformers could be reprinted, and back out to the public.

Ed.: Did you have a long-term plan to revive the old evangelical and Calvinistic writings?

IM: At that stage, in 1955–56 we had no financial means. A magazine was all we could manage, and when we started one issue of the magazine, we didn't have enough money to start a second issue, so we didn't promise readers of the first issue that there would be any more. In God's goodness gifts and help came in.

Ed.: Was the *Banner of Truth* magazine structured to include contemporary writers or only for the older Puritan and Reformed writers?

IM: Oh yes. Our hope was that the old writings would inspire another generation. At that time in 1955, there wasn't much prospect of that happening. Older men who could write were passing away, and younger men were very few. But in the next ten years, that changed and God did begin to raise up men like Jim Packer, and a number of others who were standing for these old truths. Another

thing I should say is that usually, Aaron, our experience has been that preaching paves the way for reading books. It's when people hear the truth preached, that hunger is inspired in them, and in that connection, of course, Dr. Lloyd Jones had tremendous influence. That's been repeated across the world. Where a man is preaching the truth and helped by the Holy Spirit, then the people who previously didn't read doctrinal books, they begin to read these books and realize how valuable they are. And that happened at the Reformation, didn't it?

Ed.: What authors did you find were the most impactful?

IM: Well, we tried to spread it out. Obviously Spurgeon was one very, very much in the foreground of our minds. We were convinced that there was a whole [theological] position in Spurgeon's works that wasn't remembered. But we spread it out. There were Welsh writers like John Elias, and Scottish writers. We

didn't want to make it look as there was just one group or one denomination. It's not that we think the other points don't matter. They do. But there is a big thing [the reformed faith] that holds a large number of men together.

Ed.: The *Banner of Truth* was a theological resource, while The Pastor's Study focuses on exegesis to help pastors preach the Scripture. Have you any thoughts on how best we can achieve our goal?

IM: Yes, and I'm glad you're doing that because as I looked at the magazine, I could see you are aiming to help preachers and that will help them. Sometimes we find too much preaching becomes just a sort of running commentary on the text. A preacher moving from one verse to the other. Whereas it's very important to bring out the essential principles in the text, isn't it? The way Bishop Ryle does.

He goes to a passage, and then he says, well, these are the lessons.

The first need is to know something about the people you are addressing, right? You've been there, you've experienced it, you've got a love for the men, and you are adapting what you're doing to their needs. That's essential.

PREPARING TO PREACH ON LUKE 2:8–20

Alex Stephenson

Sermon preparation requires active reading. That is, reading that seeks to understand the meaning of the text. Consider reading the text in four ways.

Read Quickly

By quickly reading the text in different translations, you will familiarise yourself with the people and events in the story. As you read Luke 2:8–20 quickly, you will realise that some events occur in the field (vss. 8–14) and some in the town (vss. 15–20).

Read Widely

You need to determine the relevant verses or chapters and read the wider context (background or setting). This will help you understand what has happened before and what will come after. You will also understand the text you are preparing to preach. Notice

how Mary's description of God as the one who exalts 'those of humble estate' (1:52) explains why God first announced the birth of Jesus to humble shepherds.

Read Slowly

Next, read the text slowly, line by line, word by word. As you do this, highlight repeated terms, verb tenses, and write down other thoughts that come to mind. Ask questions as you read.

Read Collectively

Finally, if you have access to commentaries, read them to learn from others. By reading collectively, most of your remaining questions will be answered. Commentaries will also provide you with a deeper understanding of the cultural setting—e.g, low status of shepherds.

Preach the Good News

Once you have finished reading, develop an outline with a single focus and preach the

word (2 Timothy 4:2). Your sermon could focus on the 'good news of great joy' (vs. 10) that was delivered to the shepherds in Luke 2:8–20. If so, your points may be as follows:

1. Recipients of Good News (vss. 8–9)
2. Report of Good News (vss. 10–12)
3. Reason for Good News (vss. 13–14)
4. Response to Good News (vss. 15–20)

COMMENTARY ON LUKE 2:8-20

Pastor Aaron Dunlop

When heaven came down (Luke 2:8–20)

Among the events surrounding the birth of our Lord Jesus, the story of the shepherds is surely one of the most significant. This was the first announcement of the birth of our Saviour. The author focuses our attention on the shepherds at the beginning and ending of the paragraph (vss. 8, 20).

A heavenly messenger (vss. 8–9)

The circumstances surrounding this first announcement were divinely chosen by God. This is set in Bethlehem, in the same region where Jesus was born and where David once kept his sheep (1 Samuel 17:12, 34–35).

The shepherds, devout men, as we shall see, were unexpectedly roused out of their sleep with the presence of an angel, then a “host [of angels] from Heaven (vs. 13). This was the

announcement that “the fullness of time” had come (Galatians 4:4). It occurred at night and it was announced to a few despised shepherds by an angel as the glory of the Lord shone out in the dark night skies.

The Holy Spirit, the author, has given us these details for a reason. That the angels appearing in the night teaches us first, that as the world sleeps, the God of creation does not and his purposes will be fulfilled (Psalm 121:4).

Second, that this occurred at night, illustrates for us the light of the gospel shining into the darkness of the world (vs. 9; Isaiah 9:2; John 1:5; see the workshop, page 11).

Thirdly, this event continues a theme found throughout the Scriptures of the humiliation of the Saviour. The angels did not come to the rich and powerful, but to ordinary working men, poor and vulnerable, and despised. From the very beginning, the Redeemer would be born into conflict (Genesis 3:15), in humble

and despised conditions (vs. 16), and opposed (Matthew 2:1–12).

All of this was according to the plan of God and the fulfillment of prophecy—he was a root out of a dry ground (Isaiah 53:2), and a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3). In this he identified with his people (Hebrews 2:11; 4:15).

A heavenly message (vss. 10–14)

Verses 10–12 record all that the angels said to the shepherds. We see here, comfort to introduce the message (vs. 10), the content of the message (vs. 11), the confirmation of the message (vs. 12) and then the celebration that accompanied the message of the birth of Jesus (vs. 13).

First, the shepherds were filled with fear by the sight of the angel and the brightness of the light in the night sky. The angel however comforted them by declaring the purpose of their visit, and giving a description of the

message. It was “good news” (vs. 10). Which would bring “great joy” to those who received it.

Joy is the leading characteristic of those who receive this news by faith. It is the joy that the Lord gives, the Psalmist says that it manifests itself in a “new song” (Psalm 40:3), and the strength of the believer (Nehemiah 8:10).

The description went further still. This good news, that would bring joy, was “for all people.” This birth was not a family affair, the shepherds who were outside the family have received the news. The announcement was for the nation and indeed for the nations (Romans 1:16; 2:10).

Secondly, consider the content of the message that the angel delivered (vs. 11). It was a simple message—that the Saviour had been born. No name is given here, as was given to Joseph (Matthew 1:21), but the angel used titles that the shepherds would have

understood—he is a “Saviour,” which is “Christ the Lord.” This is the one of whom the prophets had spoken, for whom the faithful, Simeon (Luke 2:25–35), Anna (Luke 2:35–38), and these shepherds were waiting.

Third, the angel confirmed the message with a “sign” (vs. 12). The “sign” was not to prove his birth, or to convince the shepherds. These shepherds already believed the message. The “sign” was simply a further detail, which would identify the correct baby, because no other baby would be laying in a manger.

Lastly, consider the praise that accompanied the message—a heavenly host appeared after the first angel had delivered the message. Why did they not come along with the first angel? These choirs were not “sent”, as the first angel was sent with the message. This was the spontaneous response of the holy angels to the news of the birth of Jesus.

The repetition of the word “glory” highlights for us how this event glorifies God. The radiant glory of the Lord shone all around the shepherds (vs. 9). Then the expressions of glory, a doxology of songs and praise (the angels vs. 14 and the shepherds, vs. 20). The angels made a connection between the glory of God and peace on earth, showing us that God is glorified when peace reigns among those with whom he is pleased (vs. 14). This is the peace of the gospel by the work of Jesus, reconciling men to God, purging the conscience (Hebrews 9:14), and bringing peace to the hearts of men and women by his Spirit (Romans 5:1; Philippians 4:7).

The response of faith (vss. 15–20)

Our attention now returns to earth, and again to the shepherds. How will the shepherds respond to this news, and how should we respond? In a spontaneous desire to find Jesus, the shepherd immediately and with haste, made their way to the manger. They

were not content to bask in the excitement of the light and glory of the heavenly host, they must find Jesus. They were confident that the Saviour had been born, this thing that “has happened,” and that God “ha[d] made known to us” (vs. 15).

Between the shepherds and those who heard the report of the shepherds, there are several characteristics identifying a receptive and believing heart; faith, action (evidence of faith), confession (vss. 15–17), and praise (vs. 20), and then amazement and mediation (vss. 18–19).

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LUKE 2:8–20, STEP BY STEP

Set the boundaries of your text

The author makes it easy for us by using the reference to the Shepherds at the beginning (vs. 8) and at the end (vs. 20). This is our passage.

Take time to read

Read the story over and over again. It will help you identify themes, repeated words or ideas, and get familiar with it for smooth pulpit reading. Read the story in different translations—English, Swahili or other languages. Read the story aloud.

Do the work of exegesis

Bring out the meaning of the text. This is where you get into the details, the verbs, the nouns, the contrasts, repeated words, and connections with other Scriptures.

When you examine each word in the text, make sure you develop your thoughts about

that word in the context of this story. See the Preacher's Workshop (pages 10-11) for examples. You can also look for theological reflections, pathways to Jesus, and other points of application.

Find the meaning of the text

The Holy Spirit put this story where it is for a reason. The story is clearly about the Shepherds, but what is it teaching us? Two things are important to keep in mind. First, that the angel first announced to shepherds the birth of Jesus (but why to shepherds?). Second, the response of the shepherds is one that we should follow.

Develop an outline

Break the text into manageable sections, and work through each section. You will see the outline that we suggest in the commentary.

Make connections

Think of the big picture. Are there connections in the Old Testament? Follow these

connections to other passages in the New Testament.

Time to get the sermon(s)

Now you can pick up on different themes, teaching or devotional ideas that you've found in the text. If you have enough material you could develop a series of sermons from the themes.

PREACHER'S WORKSHOP

EXEGETICAL NOTES (Notes on the text, words, and grammar)

Vs. 11 “a Saviour” —why does the author not use the definite article (“the Saviour”)? This is the only time in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) that Jesus is called Saviour. See John 4:42.

Vs. 14 “Praising God” the text does not strictly tell us that the angels sang. They “praised (or eulogized) God, “saying...”

“Great fear ... great joy.” —the gospel converts fear into joy and great fear into great joy.

Vs. 14 “good will,” means purpose, choice, desire, good pleasure (same word found in Matthew 11:26; Luke 10:21; Romans 10:1; Ephesians 1:5, 9; Titus 3:4).

Vs. 15 “this thing” – this matter, could be translated “this utterance” or “this word.” The birth of Jesus was God’s utterance to humanity.

Vss. 10–11 “good news” (see Isaiah 40:9; 52:7; 61:6).

Vs. 10 “all the people” this seems to be limited to “the people” of Israel. See vs. 32.

PREACHING NOTES (Points for explanation and application)

The shepherds as evangelists

The “good will” of the father (vs. 14), expressed in the praise of the angels, and later by Paul (Romans 10:1; Philippians 1:15), is shared by the shepherds.

They were faithful (vs. 8), responsible and dutiful in the simple routine of life (Matthew 25:21; 1 Timothy 5:8). See the life and calling of Moses, Elisha, Gideon.

The nature of the shepherd’s calling was such that it kept them away from the Temple. But this all changed, when the Lord spoke. The occupation of earth—the sheep—had no hold on them.

They were amazed (vs. 20). The birth of Jesus must grip the heart of the evangelist with amazement.

They were sharing (vs. 17). There was no hesitation, and immediately they needed to share what they had learned of this glorious message.

They were praising (vs. 20). The message of the gospel ought to grip us, and draw us out in praise.

QUESTIONS

Here are some questions you should ask as you prepare your sermon. They will help you focus on the meaning and most important areas of the text. You might choose to mention these questions in your sermon, or you might not.

1. What does the story teach about God? God faithful in keeping his promises to send a Saviour, and merciful to a world in the darkness of sin.

2. What does the story teach us about ourselves? This story teaches us that we need a Saviour, that we are the ones he came to save.

3. What does the story teach about Christ? This story teaches us that Jesus was indeed human, born of a woman, into a life of sorrow and humiliation, just like us.

4. What does this story tell us to do? We are told through this story to praise God for the Saviour, to meditate on who he is and what he came for.

Think of other questions that you could add.

APPLICATIONS

Application is an important part of every sermon. The Bible demands a response. Show your hearers how the teaching of the Bible affects them personally. Show them what God wants them to do and how God wants them to change. Apply your sermon specifically to different kinds of people, and work hard at making your sermons practical. Here is an example:

The lost

Emphasize to your congregation that Jesus has come, according to his promise (Genesis 3:15, etc.). He keeps his promises. Develop for your congregation the meaning for Jesus to come both as LORD and Saviour. He is LORD (and will Judge), but he can be your Saviour, and he will bring peace.

The perplexed

There is no doubt that Mary had struggled through some very confusing aspects of life. But she kept faith, and kept these events in her mind. Mary took time to connect the circumstances of life to the gospel and the purposes of God.

The believer

The needs reminded that God has kept his promises of old and that he will therefore keep his promises to us. We are those “with whom he is pleased” (vs. 14).

HOW GOD USED SHEPHERDS

Caleb Nakina

Luke 2:8–14 describes the time when an angel announced the birth of Jesus. After they heard the angel's message, they visited the newborn Savior. From verses 15–20, the passage offers insights into their worshipful response to this divine revelation.

The shepherds demonstrated faith by acting immediately on the news, and they took the initiative to share this good news with others. Their responsive worship was transformed into actions that glorified God. True worship involves more than private devotion—it is public obedience and active participation in spreading God's good news. The angels believed and acted; they went and saw, and they told others.

What kind of people were the shepherds?
They were from a low socio-economic class,

poor ordinary people, despised by most in Israel.

But God uses ordinary people for the advancement of his extraordinary gospel. Those who compare the Gospels know that Luke gives more attention to women than the other Gospels do. Women were not highly regarded in the society of Luke's original audience, and neither were shepherds. So, Luke demonstrates that God uses people whom we might think could not be beneficial to the kingdom. Even today, God values, calls, and uses people whom we least expect for him to use.

Learn here, an endearing truth about God, that he does not deal with people based on their social class. Luke shows us that God can use anyone of us in extraordinary ways. Imagine how different human relationships would be if we did not treat others according to the values of our society.

The shepherds' story calls us to re-evaluate our own prejudices. We recognize that God, who looks on the heart, presents a better system of evaluation than the world's arbitrary and inconsistent standards. Witnessing the extraordinary ways God works through seemingly ordinary individuals, we learn that anyone can find purpose and significance by serving God faithfully like the shepherds.

WORSHIP OF THE HEAVENLY HOST

John Dyck

Angels are an amazing part of God's creation. It is important to know what the Bible itself says about them.

False Worship

Their appearance is so impressive that men are inclined to worship them. This happened twice to the Apostle John when he was in heaven (Revelation 19:10; 22:9). Both times the angel warned him not to do so, but to worship God alone. Paul warned the Church in Colossae against those who taught that they should worship angels (Colossians 2:18).

Part of Creation

Angels are created beings who were made lower than the Creator and higher than mankind. The Bible tells us three times that when Christ became a man he was made a little lower than the angels. In Psalm 8:5 God

is praised because “You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honour.” Hebrews 2:7 and 9 shows that this prophecy was fulfilled.

Created to Worship

Angels are closely tied to the worship of God. Even before man was created the angels worshipped him. The Lord calls them “morning stars” and “sons of God” when he speaks to his servant Job (Job 38:4, 7). They glorified God for his creation of the world because (1) he is worthy of all praise and (2) as part of that creation, that is their purpose (Revelation 4:11; 5:11–12). Isaiah saw them surround the throne of God in worship (Isaiah 6:3). In heaven the apostle John looks and hears “the voice of many angels around the throne... saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!’” (Revelation 5:11–12).

Angels and Salvation

These angels are described as “an innumerable company” (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11) who are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). There is great joy in their presence when just one sinner repents (Luke 15:10). And yet, because they themselves have never sinned and received the grace of God in salvation, they desire to look into the things that are involved in the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:12). The gold angels looking downward upon the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant are a picture of this (Exodus 25:20).

Worship and Humility

There was a day in the history of the world when the angels rejoiced and glorified God for a special reason: the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. In that day Christ humbled himself to become a man in order to bring salvation to his Church.

The Book of Hebrews says that when he brought “the firstborn into the world, he says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship him.’” (Hebrews 1:6). They were commanded to praise and magnify Christ even though he was born in a manger. They were sent to ordinary, common shepherds to announce the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Worship in Glory

Angels are very prominent in the book of Revelation. They act on the command of God in final judgment throughout the book. However, even in judgment they do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Their worship is described in Revelation chapters 4, 5, and 7. The worship of the angels has always been constant, without the disturbance of sin. God’s people look forward to participating in that worship when they enter glory.

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Protestant and Reformed churches hold that there are two sacraments in the Church; Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The word sacrament in ancient usage simply meant that which is sacred, or dedicated to religious purposes. This word, however, has been misused, and many people (particularly Baptists) prefer the word "ordinance," which simply means a practice established by authority, in this case, the authority of Jesus.

Augustine, the great North African theologian said, these two ordinances are "visible signs of invisible grace."

The sacraments of the Church are visual proclamations of the gospel and object lessons of the grace of Christ in the gospel. They are "signs and seals" of the gospel, and show that we have been brought into the

family of God (Baptism), and sit in communion with him and his people at his table.

While Baptism and the Lord's Supper are necessary in the life of the Church, the spiritual growth of the believer and his/her enjoyment of the gospel, they are not necessary for salvation.

ENCOURAGE YOUR PEOPLE TO PRAY

Tonny Karwa

Virtually every pastor agonizes and laments over empty prayer meetings. How can this be?. Why would prayer be treated as an optional extra by the church? Prayer is so important since our relationship with God is a dialogue. He speaks to us through his Word and we respond to him through prayer. This means that when we do not pray, this communication becomes a monologue. How can you as a pastor encourage your members to be more prayerful?

Encourage them through Instruction.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ taught their disciples [how] to pray (Luke 11:1). First, we ought to instruct our members on the forms of prayer (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Timothy 2:1ff). Thankfully, there are so many recorded prayers in the Bible from which to glean

including many of the psalms. They contain the various forms of prayer such as adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, and confession. All these can greatly serve to guide our members on how to pray biblically.

Secondly, we should instruct them on the frequency of prayer. The apostle Paul, following in the footsteps of Christ, frequently exhorted the saints to be steadfast in prayer (Ephesians 6:18ff; Colossians 4:2ff; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Thirdly, we ought to emphasize the fervency in prayer (Jude 20; James 5:17). The point here is that instruction deals with ignorance.

Encourage them through Imitation.

Formulating a prayer is not easy. It is not enough, therefore, for pastors, to simply preach to your members about prayer. Prayer is best learnt through imitation. Members would want to see how you respond to the various situations you daily encounter in your

Christian life, such as the failing economy, loss, grief, temptation, weakness, etc. Do you clothe yourself with an attitude of grumbling or murmuring or do you pray with a sense of victory at such times?

Thankfully, Christ and His apostles modelled the best response for us. They always prayed in all situations, including the times they were in much affliction and difficulty. Christ did not simply tell his disciples to pray that they may not enter into temptation. He took some of them to the place where he prayed shortly before his betrayal and arrest (Matthew 26:37).

Later, we see the same apostles and the rest of the church follow His example in response to persecution (Acts 4:23).

This implies that you must exemplify prayer in your personal life and ministry as a pastor. The flock should see and hear you pray. In many of his epistles to the churches, the Apostle Paul

assured the saints of his incessant prayers for them (1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). He also prayed ceaselessly for individual Christians like Philemon and Timothy (Philemon 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:3).

That Paul prioritised prayer is also seen in his plea for partnership in prayer on several occasions (Ephesians 6:19–20; Colossians 4:2–4).

Encourage them through Involvement.

Christ involved his disciples in his prayer-life. Here, they could learn how to pray. The apostle Paul, on several occasions, employs the firstperson plural pronoun “we” in his letters whenever he assures a particular church of his steadfast prayers for them (Colossians 1:3,9; 1 Thessalonians 1:2). Just like Christ, his companions were not mere

spectators in his life. He integrated them into his moments of prayer.

As a pastor, you can nurture a praying church by involving them, not just in the corporate prayers but also integrating them into your prayer life. Let the brethren see you pray over various things, including personal struggles according to the wisdom granted to you.

CALVIN ON SEEKING HOLINESS THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS (PT. 1)

Joel Beeke

Calvin defines the sacraments as testimonies “of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him.” The sacraments are “exercises of piety.”

For Calvin, as for Augustine before him, the sacraments are the visible Word. The preached Word comes through our ears; the visible Word, through our eyes. The sacraments hold forth the same Christ as the preached Word but communicate him through a different mode. We don’t get a better Christ in the sacraments, but sometimes we get Christ better.

In the sacraments, God accommodates himself to our weakness, Calvin says. When we hear the Word indiscriminately

proclaimed, we may wonder: “Is it truly for me? Does it really reach me?” However, in the sacraments God reaches out and touches us individually, and says, “Yes, it’s for you. The promise extends to you.” The sacraments thus minister to our weakness by personalizing the promises for those who trust Christ for salvation.

In the sacraments, God comes to His people, encourages them, enables them to know Christ better, builds them up, and nourishes them in Him. Baptism promotes piety as a symbol of how believers are engrafted into Christ, renewed by the Spirit, and adopted into the family of the heavenly Father.

Likewise, the Lord’s Supper shows how these adopted children are fed by their loving Father. Calvin loves to refer to the Supper as nourishment for the soul. “The signs are bread and wine which represent for us the invisible

food that we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ,” he says.

Christ is the only food of our soul, and therefore our heavenly Father invites us to Christ, that refreshed by partaking of him, we may repeatedly gather strength until we shall have reached heavenly immortality.

ON MARRIAGE: MARGARET CHARLTON BAXTER, A PURITAN WIFE

Dr. Michael Haykin

If I were asked to recommend one solid book on marriage, I would turn to *The Christian Directory* by Richard Baxter of Kidderminster (1616–1691). Baxter had a rich understanding of marriage because of his knowledge of the Word of God and also his own marriage to a wealthy woman called Margaret Charlton.

Margaret had been converted under Baxter's preaching at Kidderminster. Initially, when Margaret heard Baxter's preaching, she did not like him or the people of the town. Baxter tells us that she had a "great aversion to the poverty and strictness of the people" of the town. She was frivolous and held by a love for this world and was far more interested in "glittering herself in costly apparel."

The Holy Spirit, though, was at work in her life. A series of sermons that Baxter preached on the doctrine of conversion was “received on her heart as the seal on the wax,” and her spiritual transformation was swift and genuine.

Baxter was a key leader among the Puritans and on one occasion arrested and imprisoned. He and Margaret were married in 1662 and went to live in London, where they were forced to move house frequently.

It was illegal for Baxter to preach, but Margaret more than once used large portions of her wealth to pay for chapels to be built for her husband’s ministry. On one occasion in 1673, she asked him where in London he most desired to preach. He told her, “St. Martin’s Parish, where are said to be forty thousand more than can come into the Church, ... where ... many live like Americans [that is, the Indigenous Peoples], and have heard no

sermon of many years.” So Margaret set out to have a chapel built in this parish on a vacant lot.

Some blamed Margaret for busying “her head so much about churches, and works of charity” and not being “content to live privately and quietly.” But Baxter defended her: “this is but just what profane unbelievers say against all zeal and spiritual godliness ... Doth not Paul call some women his helps in the gospel?,” (see Philippians 4:3 and Romans 16:2–6).

Like every married couple, Richard and Margaret were imperfect characters. As Richard said: “My dear wife did look for more good in me than she found ... We are all like pictures that must not be looked at too near.” Yet, they managed to have a wonderful marriage. What was their secret?

Well, first, Richard and Margaret delighted in one another:

When husband and wife take pleasure in each other, it uniteth them in duty, it helpeth them with ease to do their work, and bear their burdens ... “Rejoice with the wife of thy youth, as the loving hind and pleasant roe, let her breast satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love” [Proverbs 5:18–19].

Then, they had a tremendous agreement about what ultimately mattered in life:

Nothing causeth so near and fast and comfortable an union as to be united in one God, one Christ, one Spirit, one Church, one hope of heavenly glory.

THE BENEFIT OF GOD'S VISITATION

Joshua Muthukya

The first thing we learn about the shepherds is that they were in the fields tending their sheep. We must pause and acknowledge here, that the Lord honours hard work, and idleness is a mockery of true faith. On the other extreme, we should not allow work (business) to distract us from devotion time.

Receiving the Message

The shepherds understood the message of the angels (vss. 10–12). God's message of salvation is clear, plain and sensible, and needs no special interpreter.

The shepherds also approached the message reverently, and with fear (vss. 9–10), and we should approach God's revelation. We should approach the King with Godly fear, and expect at the same time to find comfort there. Our King is our Father in heaven!

Responding to the Message

The angelic message was assuring—“do not fear,” and encouraging, “good tidings. It was redemptive, bringing news of the “Saviour. This revelation demands a response. Faith in God’s revelation, reflects our knowledge, our attitudes, our desires, and our resolutions. We must, as the Westminster Confession (14.2) puts it, yield “obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatening, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come.”

Sharing the Message

Finally notice how these shepherds shared what they learned, as we also should share the message of the gospel. They shared the message among themselves (vs. 15), fellowshiping around the message, conversing about it and enjoying it. They also shared the message with others (vs. 17). There is joy in sharing God’s message, and they glorified and praised God for it (vs. 20).

Notice how Mary kept (guarded and preserved) the message in her heart. It was important to her that she remember the details as they applied to her life and circumstances, and that she could meditate on them in the days and months in the future.

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